

# **Report to Abolition 2000 AGM from the Phoenix Settlement Trust and Gandhi Development Trust**

*Presented by Ela Gandhi*

Phoenix Settlement was established by Mahatma Gandhi in 1904 in Inanda South Africa. We celebrate its 120th anniversary this year and our theme for the year is "let us build a culture of nonviolence together".

This theme is based on the fact that in setting up Phoenix Settlement, Gandhiji took a conscious decision that in order to serve the people; he had to move away from an affluent life-style to a simple life style which is sustainable. He moved to a rural un-serviced neighbourhood. Here he began experimenting on conservation of the earth, water and energy and looking at ways in which those with limited means can survive. He realised that to have a world free of violence we have to begin with ourselves and so on this settlement they found ways to live together in diversity and with selfless service to others as their key motivation. They grew their own food and attempted to be as less dependent on the outside world as possible.

The immediate neighbours in this area were the indentured workers living in barracks close to the Settlement. The followers of Rev. Isaiah Shembe a religious leader of the Nazareth faith and Dr John Langalibelele Dube who later became the first President of the South African Native National Congress founded in January 1912, and in 1923 renamed as the African National Congress (ANC), who was also the founder of the Ohlange Institute, a secondary school where students were taught various handwork skills were both neighbours of the Phoenix Settlement.

These neighbours shared similar thoughts and experiences and had profound influence on the thinking of each other.

For Gandhiji nonviolence was a way of life and at Phoenix Settlement he began perfecting this way of life. It was a norm with Gandhiji that if he himself cannot do something he cannot ask others to do it. This experiment was therefore to begin to train him to live a simple frugal life and to learn about the various cultures and religions and to respect all in their diversity.

This was a lifestyle that would prevent major conflicts and help to bring about peaceful resolution of any conflicts that may arise.

Abolition of nuclear weapons is a call to those in power to stop their destructive trend and bring an end to violence. Living a life of nonviolence is a call to humanity as a whole, to move away from self-centeredness to a communal centeredness and think and act in ways that helps the whole community rather than just themselves. In such thinking there is no place for nuclear weapons and even other weapons.

Phoenix Settlement Trust and Gandhi Development Trust have agreed to take this powerful message based at Phoenix to the entire world. We seek collaboration with like-minded organisations to work together in their respective geographical areas to take this message forward and to begin to live by and promote these ideas. So in calling for abolition of nuclear weapons we are also calling for the embracing of a culture of nonviolence.